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Full Comment

Rex Murphy: This mess of an election has definitely changed the climate in the West

If the new minority government really wants to show that it cares about Alberta, Trudeau should hold his first cabinet meeting in Fort McMurray

Rex Murphy

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A man wears an anti-Liberal hat in the rotunda of the Alberta Legislature, after the province's 2019 budget was delivered, in Edmonton on Oct. 24, 2019. PHOTO BY DAVID BLOOM/POSTMEDIA NEWS

Justin Trudeau has stated his priority going forward will be climate change. He sees it as “unifying.” Many are claiming the election was “a climate-change election.” I beg to differ on both counts.

Legitimizing the mess we just endured under the explanatory banner that it was a vote about climate change is claptrap, and a pretty low grade of claptrap at that. Not even the watery pilgrimage of the sainted Greta Thunberg to our shores, and the emptying of half the schoolrooms of the nation for what was called a climate emergency march, had any perceptible effect on Monday’s vote.

Were climate change the central motivator, then surely this week would have seen Elizabeth May and a lavish posse of newly elected Greens setting the terms of Trudeau’s survival in the House of Commons, among which the first would surely have been sealing off Alberta from the rest of the country, until the May-Trudeau coalition could find some other place to put it.

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Ms. May's personal vehicle, which we know as the Green party, did make voluminous gains, for she increased its representation by a full 50 per cent. That is, instead of a solid two Green MPs, both from Vancouver Island, there is now one more, this time in New Brunswick, which surely qualifies the Greens as pan-Canadian at last.

But when you've got the end of the world as your calling card, and a leader who gladly appoints herself as the instrument of that same world's salvation — a most powerful pitch — then surely, after 13 years of trying, you should be doing better than electing three candidates in a Parliament of 338. And if, as so many are still saying, this was a climate-change election, then the one leader who has made climate change her brand and banner, and who in a CBC interview stated "I have to save the whole world," and worse, obviously believes she can, would have done better than adding one more member to an already unwieldy caucus of two.

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There is however one sense in which the claim that the election was "about" climate change is true. It may easily be found in the vote in Alberta and Saskatchewan. The recklessness and fury with which environmentalists, professional and amateur, have been pummelling the energy industry for years now, lacerating Alberta's oil sands in every venue and at every change, bad-mouthing Canada's oil and gas industry to the entire world, has tremendously enraged Westerners, and as Monday's vote so worrisomely demonstrated, has left them feeling estranged and undervalued in the Confederation.

An electronic billboard calls for an independent Alberta in Edmonton on Oct. 23, 2019. PHOTO BY IAN KUCERAK/POSTMEDIA NEWS

I spent a couple of days in Alberta this week, and the feeling out there is a combination of gloom, disappointment and puzzlement. Most Albertans are asking very plain and sad questions: “What have we done to deserve this treatment? Why are we the villains in this play? Why has Ottawa, the Trudeau government in particular, hounded us with regulations and legislation (i.e. Bill C-69, known as the anti-pipeline law) that are killing our economy? Why don’t they (the feds) give us fair hearing? Why can’t we have access to world markets? And why, oh why, with the three vast economies of the world — the U.S., China and India — blasting away at energy development while being totally exempt from the precious Paris agreements, why are we supposed to be carrying all the load?”

And finally, the biggest question of all: Why is our national government so supportive of the climate-change engineers, the IPCC, the Sierra Clubs. Why does Mr. Trudeau join the juvenile climate march, seek a photo session with Greta, entertain Bill Nye the (silly) Science Guy?” If you seek the reason for Western estrangement, check out the front bench of Trudeau’s first term. Check out his obsessive desire to be one with the Gores, the DiCaprios, the nomads of first-class high-flying to luxury climate summits?

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Why is the West so ticked off? Because it has come to realize that every climate sermon from Trudeau or Environment Minister Catherine McKenna is a blast at Canada's energy industry, and another swipe in particular at Alberta. They have realized that Trudeau's over-dramatization of climate change, and his insistence — against all logic — that Canada has any significant role at all in reducing global emissions, has worked to the exclusion and denigration of Alberta's standing in the Confederation.

So was climate change the issue of this election? Well, in this darkly ironic manner — yes. The result of the fixation on climate change is a deeply fractured Parliament, the return of Quebec separatism with a 32-seat block for the Bloc, and no government representation for an entire region of the country. Yeah, climate change did play a great part in election 2019, while politicians danced with the world-savers, then neglected the home base.

St. Albert MLA Marie Renaud and Calgary-McCall MLA Irfan Sabir stand beside two men wearing pro oil and gas T-shirts in the rotunda of the Alberta Legislature in Edmonton on Oct. 24, 2019. PHOTO BY DAVID BLOOM/POSTMEDIA NEWS

Let me revise the famous McKenna chant — the environment and the economy go hand in hand. No they don't. You can only have an environmental policy when you have an economy that can support its imperatives. I've written before: you can choose Paris, or you can choose Calgary. And up to now, it's been Paris all the way.

Here's a parting thought. If this new minority government really wants to show that it knows how important Alberta is in Confederation, Trudeau could make his first Cabinet meeting an open one, and hold it in the town the climate-changers have battered for so long.

Hold it in Fort Mac. Say thanks for what one town has done for Canadian workers and the economy.

The day Trudeau does that, the Maple Leaf will fly on every house and building.

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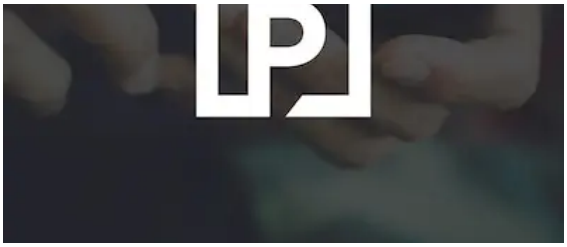

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